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ABSTRACT

This book examines the cultural universal of religion and spirituality from a multicultural perspective and a time dimension. The text is written for juveniles and includes many color photographs. Chapters include: (1) "The Need to Believe"; (2) "The Americas"; (3) "Africa"; (4) "Europe and the Middle East"; (5) "Asia"; and (6) "Australia and the South Pacific." The volume concludes with a glossary and a 14-item list of further reading suggestions. (EH)

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Worlds of Belief

Religion and Spirituality



Worlds of Belief

Religion and Spirituality

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in collaboration with the Denver Museum of Natural History

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- On the cover: A group of Buddhist monks walk across the courtyard of their monastery in Thailand (© Hilarie Kavanagh/Tony Stone Worldwide).
- On the title page: Children kneel before an outdoor shrine in the Irish countryside (© Brian Seed/Tony Stone Worldwide).

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Introduction

As we neared the end of an exciting journey through Turkey, my traveling companion and I stood at the back of a commuter ferry and sailed up the Bosphorus Strait, away from the capital city of Istanbul. As the boat chugged away, we soaked up the comforting sight of the cozy three- and four-story row houses that lined the shores. The ferry zigzagged across the narrow Bosphorus, stopping frequently to unload passengers, and we caught sight of two young girls staring wide-eyed at us. Both my friend and I immediately assumed the girls were sisters—their matching brown hair and deep brown eyes gave them away. The older one—about thirteen—smiled and, without saying a word, held out a crumpled bag of pistachio nuts in a universal gesture of friendship. Ticked, my friend and I accepted and, in return, offered the girls a handful of chocolate candy we kept stashed in our packs for just such an occasion.

Over the next hour, we and many other passengers were entertained as the girls presided over a floating language classroom, designed to teach us the essentials of Turkish: *lüften* ("please"), *feribot* ("ferry"), and, of course, *fistik* ("pistachio nut"). They also offered a small geography lesson as they pointed out their town on the map. In return, we pulled out a map and pointed to our towns—worlds away, or so it seemed. Soon the younger sister—about seven—took my hand and led us down below to where a group of women were unpacking lunches from their bags. We did our best to introduce ourselves, stumbling in Turkish, laughing a little, smiling a lot. Clearly these were our young friends' mothers and aunts—and they were as friendly and gracious as could be. By the time the ferry approached their stop, my companion and I had relished tastes of dates, figs, and *börek*—the popular and tasty spinach pastries. In return, they had enjoyed listening to our small gifts of American jazz tapes. Before we parted, we exchanged addresses so that we could send copies of the pictures we had taken of each other. Finally, as all good mothers would, the women made sure that my friend and I knew which bus to take back to the city. They even gave us bus tickets in case we didn't have the correct coins.

As we rode back to Istanbul, I marveled at how two groups of people from such disparate cultures could meet and, in just an hour, bridge oceans of differences in order to become friends. How had we managed—with so few words and common experiences—to communicate, laugh, share lunch, and even decide that we actually liked each other? A few years later—on a beach halfway around the world—another encounter brought these thoughts rushing back.

It was during an expedition to the cold, foggy tip of a Siberian peninsula that I met other children, this time gathered, curious, as we stepped off our boat and onto the rocky beach of their small village. A few adults stood watching, more cautious, at the edge of a cluster of grey, peeling buildings that were barely visible from shore.

As I stood facing a handful of ten- to twelve-year-old Siberian boys, I was immediately struck by the obstacles that seemed to stand between us: We didn't speak the same language; we knew virtually nothing about each other; and we had only a few hours before our ship continued its journey northbound.

Our first attempts at communication were the obvious hand signals and smiles, but we met little success. Then one of the boys discreetly pulled a small hidden treasure from his pocket, and the others quickly followed suit. Within seconds, our group was presented with a wonderful variety of items, including a collection of carved animals in bone and ivory, small leather pouches trimmed with seal fur, and a rock of a particularly interesting shape. All these treasures were being held out to us for sale or trade, a universal language that all my fellow travelers understood immediately.

Meanwhile, one boy pulled me aside and proudly demonstrated his handmade sling shot. As he aimed at a fence, cans on the beach, and an unfortunate team of dogs chained to a nearby post, he gave me a no-frills lesson in Siberian sling-shot technique.

It had been only twenty or thirty minutes since our arrival, but by the time we all walked up the beach together, we had become at least short-term friends. When we reached town, the boys enthusiastically introduced us to their families. Naturally, we took out photos of our families and offered views in return. We then traded a few modest trinkets and, before we departed, were given a guided tour of the village museum. There we caught glimpses of the spectacular ivory carvings that make the artists of this particular village famous.

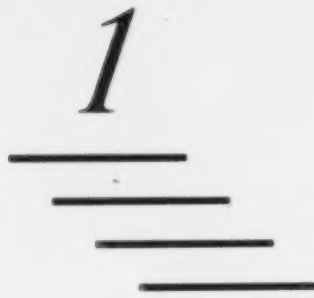
In both the bustling outskirts of Istanbul and the remote Siberian village, I came face to face with young people from worlds vastly different from my own. In each case, we were separated by different languages, customs, and lifestyles. Both times, however, curiosity, a desire to learn, and a shared sense of friendship, family, and fun enabled us to bring our worlds together for a brief time.

The memories I have of Turkey and Siberia—as well as others like them—come to my mind often as I work in museums, study anthropology collections, and teach others about cultures. These are recollections I hold particularly dear because, above all, they remind me of what it really means to be human. They prove that, even though people may appear very different on the surface, our differences all grow out of the same basic needs. They grow out of needs that all humans share: the need to communicate; to create and appreciate beauty; to learn; even the need to play and have fun.

All of these needs connect us. What makes us different is how each group of people develops its own unique answers to these needs. Together, their answers create a unique way of life, a pattern we call culture. But, underneath the patterns on the surface—whether we live in a big-city apartment or dwell in a desert tent—we remain linked by our common needs. These needs, and the human spirit that enables us to fulfill them, bind us together into one “human family.”

Beth Steinhorn
*Anthropology Educator
 Denver Museum of Natural History*





The Need to Believe

Each morning, like people all over the world, we rise to begin our day. Walking outside to work, school, or play, we feel the solid ground beneath our feet. We feel the sun, wind, or rain on our skin and we see and hear the things going on around us. This is the world we know in our everyday lives; but for people in cultures around the globe, this physical reality is only a part of the whole picture of life.

All cultures recognize the possible existence of a world of supernatural powers that affect the affairs of those living in the physical world. In some cultures, this supernatural world is considered to be completely separate from the physical world. In others, the two are mingled as one, together in the same place and at the same time. Although different cultures have different beliefs about what the supernatural world is like, the basic faith that it exists is found in communities everywhere. From this kind of faith, or spirituality, have sprung the countless rituals and ceremonies that are at the heart of the world's religions.

- Opposite: A young woman holds a handful of paper lilies as she prays at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar (Burma).



- A crucifixion scene adorns a country road in rural Austria.

Through the ages, religious and spiritual teachings have been taught from generation to generation. Sometimes recorded in books, sometimes passed orally, these teachings influence individuals as well as communities—from small villages to large empires. Throughout history, religion has had a great impact on the politics, family life, art, architecture, literature, and music of societies around the world. Wars have been fought over religious ideals. In some places, people have been killed or driven from their homelands because of the religions they practiced.

But why are religious beliefs and practices such important parts of life in cultures everywhere? Perhaps it is due to the human ability to reason. Because of this ability, we often question the world around us, and religion offers us answers. Religion allows us to better understand the world in which we live and to find our place within it. When people cannot control what happens to them, they often look to the supernatural world for guidance. Religious and spiritual teachings explain why things in the physical world happen as they do, and offer comfort and hope during times of misfortune.

Besides providing a way of looking at life, religion and spirituality also provide a way of behaving. A culture's religious beliefs, teachings, and practices instruct the individual in how to be a proper person. They give each follower a code of morals so that he or she can behave well and be an accepted member

of the community. (It is important to keep in mind that this sense of "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "evil" differs from one culture to the next.)

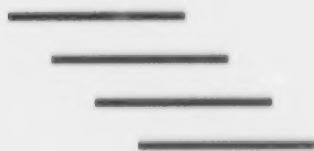
Whenever cultures meet, religious beliefs are among the many new ideas introduced. The result of this contact has sometimes been a peaceful exchange. Buddhism, for example, spread over time from India to other parts of Asia, where it was welcomed and adopted by many. In contrast, some religions have been forced upon other cultures, as when the Spanish conquered the Americas and forced the native peoples to convert to Christianity. In still other parts of the world, missionaries have strongly encouraged native people to accept new religions. Usually, when the new religions were adopted, they were mixed with the native cultures' own spiritual traditions.

Today, because religions have spread in these ways, many of the same religions can be found in different places around the world. There are, however, certain differences in belief and practice among cultures that share the same religion. Because no two cultures in the world are alike, each culture interprets its spiritual traditions in its own way, according to the world view of its people.

The following chapters offer only a glimpse into some of these complex traditions. Each chapter begins with a brief description of the major religions and spiritual traditions practiced in a particular part of the world. Following this, in "Entering the Spiritual Community," we explore the rituals that surround the individual as he or she becomes a member of the religious or spiritual group. Then, in "Community Rituals and Celebrations," we discuss how the community binds together in times of joy and strife to reaffirm its shared beliefs.

You will discover that from the largest, busiest cities to the most remote of mountain villages, members of our human family all share the custom of recognizing certain unseen powers as being worthy of our awe and respect. Although some of the religions discussed are different from your own, you will find that some practices are more similar to yours than you once may have thought.





The Americas



European colonization and conquest brought many changes to the Caribbean and North, Central, and South America—including the introduction of Christianity. In areas of conquest, invading armies

forced Christianity on the indigenous (native) peoples of the Americas. Today, Christian religions are still the most widely practiced in the Western Hemisphere. However, many indigenous practices continue to thrive and are sometimes mixed with Christian practices. In some areas, the descendants of African slaves combine Christianity with African spirituality brought over by their ancestors.

Also in this part of the world is a variety of other spiritual traditions, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and

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• Opposite: An Easter procession winds its way through the streets of Antigua City in Guatemala.

many more. This assortment of religions has developed in the Americas as a result of years of immigration and forced movement that brought large groups of peoples together from all over the globe.

Entering the Spiritual Community

Learning about the spiritual customs of one's culture is a lifelong process. Along the way, young people are taught by family members, elders of the community, and religious and spiritual leaders. Later in life, when these young people become adults, they will, in turn, instruct their own children as they continue to learn themselves.

Learning from the Elders

In many native cultures of North America, children often learn about the spiritual traditions of their religion by joining elders in ritual. The Hopi of the American Southwest perform cere-

monies throughout the year during specific seasons. This cycle of ceremonies reaffirms the Hopi's spiritual connection to the land. Their homeland is a sacred place to them, where powerful spirits make their home along with people. For the Hopi, spiritual harmony is achieved by living with the natural environment in a respectful way. Their ceremonies are held to give thanks to the spirits and to ask for help.



• A painted Hopi kachina figure, made in Tucson, Arizona, in the United States.

From December to July, ceremonies are held in honor of the *kachinas*, which are friendly, helpful spirits that bring rain to the Hopi's desert home so that crops will grow. The Hopi recognize hundreds of *kachinas*, and each one is believed to have its own personality and appearance. In elaborate ceremonies, Hopi men dance, wearing brightly decorated masks and ceremonial outfits to represent the *kachinas*. It is believed that the *kachina* spirits borrow the bodies of men at this time and actually visit with the Hopi people.

The *kachinas* also play a role in disciplining children in the Hopi community. Some of the dancers dress as "ogre *kachinas*." These ogres approach unruly children and threaten to kidnap and eat them if the youngsters continue to misbehave. Also during the ceremonies, dancers give carved *kachina* figures to the children of the village. These figures, called *tihu*, are treasured by Hopi children as reminders of what the important spirits represent.

In some cultures, in addition to participating in rituals and ceremonies, a person receives a religious education from elders by going to a special school. In the Jewish religion, young people go to Hebrew school to learn about Judaism and to study the Hebrew language. This prepares the youngster to take part in a special ceremony of initiation into the religious community.

At age thirteen, a young person becomes an adult member of the Jewish community when he or she becomes bar mitzvah (son of the Commandments) or bat mitzvah (daughter of the Commandments). The ceremony to honor this rite of passage is called by the same name and is an important event in many American Jewish communities.

The bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah is held under the leadership of a rabbi, as he or she has supervised the religious education of the young Jew up to this point. During the ceremony, the young person reads in Hebrew from the sacred text, called the Torah. The reading signifies, among many things, the completion of the first level of religious education and learning. When the religious part of the ceremony is over, the family usually hosts a party to celebrate the joyous event, where there is music,



- A thirteen-year-old Jewish boy reads from the Torah during his bar mitzvah ceremony.

food, and presents for the bar or bat mitzvah. Sometimes, instead of giving an elaborate party, an American family will send the bar or bat mitzvah on a trip to Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people.

Taking part in this ceremony is a special time in the life of a young Jewish person. In being welcomed as an adult by the

elders of the religious community, the person accepts new responsibilities that strengthen his or her ties to Judaism. And, as the ties to religion are strengthened and confirmed, so are the individual's ties to family, elders, and heritage.

Other Rituals of Initiation

Like the bar or bat mitzvah, initiation rituals can be found in most cultures around the world. Often they are celebrated in a twofold way, as are the bar and bat mitzvahs: They begin with a serious, but joyous, religious ritual, followed by a festive social gathering of relatives and friends. Throughout the Americas, where Catholicism is common, many children look forward to the initiation ceremonies of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

In addition to going to church and learning about Catholicism from parents and elders in the community, the Catholic child also attends religious instruction classes. These

- Young girls dressed in special outfits gather together before their First Communion ceremony on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia.



classes are taught by priests, nuns, or other members of the community knowledgeable in religious doctrine. In class, the child learns what it means to be a Catholic and what kind of behavior is expected of him or her by the Catholic community. This learning is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, whom Catholics believe is the Son of God.

At about eight or nine years old, after attending religious instruction classes, the child is now ready to make First Holy Communion. First Holy Communion is the initial step in becoming an adult member of the Catholic religion, as it is the first time a Catholic receives the Eucharist. The Eucharist consists of wafers made of flour and water and wine that, when blessed by a priest, are believed to become the body and blood of Christ. According to Christian belief, God sent Jesus Christ into the world as a mortal man, who was later put to death, to save humanity from sin. It is believed that Jesus took the world's sins upon Himself so that humanity could have another chance of leading a sinless life.

During the Catholic ceremony known as a mass, the priest offers the Eucharist to each parishioner. (In some churches, only the wafer without the wine is offered.) Each time a Catholic accepts the Eucharist, he or she makes a connection with God. It is only after making First Holy Communion that a child can officially participate in this important ritual of all Catholic masses.

A few years later, at about age twelve or thirteen, a young Catholic participates in the ceremony of Confirmation. This is the next level in a child's growth to spiritual adulthood. The ceremony is followed by further participation in religious instruction classes, where the child continues to learn about Catholic teachings on a more advanced level.

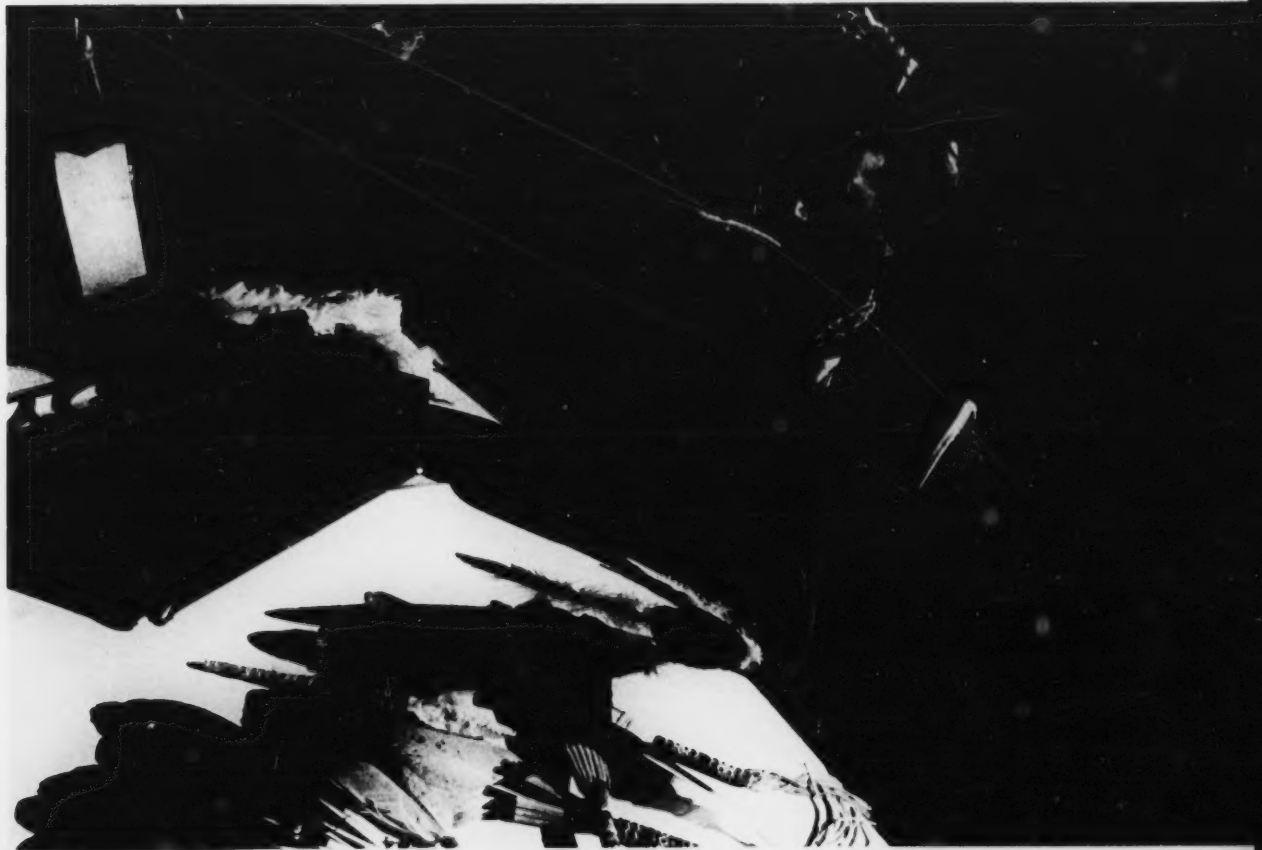
Confirmation is a time for a young person to reaffirm vows of loyalty to God, made originally on his or her behalf by the child's godparents at baptism. At that time, when the child was still an infant, the godparents were chosen by the boy's or girl's parents to help act as religious teachers and role models, and to offer guidance throughout the child's life. At Confirmation, the

boy or girl chooses a sponsor, whose role is similar to that of the godparent. By reaffirming the vows made at baptism, the young person shows that he or she is now ready to take on the responsibility of being a mature member of the religious community.

Religious Leaders

Sometimes, a person's religious education leads to becoming a religious or spiritual specialist. To become a priest or a nun, for example, a Catholic must go to a seminary or a convent for special instruction, just as a Jew must go to rabbinical school to become a rabbi. During this training, the person studies the principles and practices of the religion, as well as how to lead others in his or her faith. In some cultures, the religious specialist must earn a college degree before attending these special schools. Then, upon completion of his or her studies,

- An Apache medicine man blows an eagle-bone whistle as part of an ancient ritual.



the individual participates in a ceremony in which he or she is publicly recognized as a religious specialist.

In some cultures, especially tribal ones, the specialist does not go to school. Rather, he or she learns by undergoing extensive training with another religious specialist already established in the community. One type of religious specialist, found in many tribal cultures, is the shaman, a healer who communicates with the spiritual world, often by going into a trance.

Shamans can be found all over the world, including Africa, Asia, Siberia, and the Americas. Guided by the spirits' advice, a shaman is able to find a cure for his or her patient. In addition to healing, shamans in some cultures may be called upon to find a lost person, give guidance, or offer a blessing for a person or event.

Among the Yanomami of Brazil, a person training to become a shaman must fast periodically, sometimes for long periods of time. Yanomami shamans are always men, although in some cultures, women may be shamans as well. During his training period, a Yanomami learns how to attract the spirits that help shamans in their work. Once the spirits are attracted, they are believed to live inside the body of the shaman. The training shaman must also learn how to go into a trance to call on the spirits. This happens by taking a drug made from native plants. Once this is accomplished, the shaman is ready to practice.

Community Rituals and Celebrations

Religious rituals and celebrations may be performed by an individual, such as a person praying alone, or by a community of individuals. Sometimes the community may be small—like a group of family and friends—or large, like an entire village. Sometimes a ritual or ceremony celebrated by many may focus on an individual. Religious rites of passage, for example, celebrate an individual's progress in his or her spiritual knowledge and understanding. Yet the celebration, although held for the individual, is usually celebrated along with the individual's friends and family.

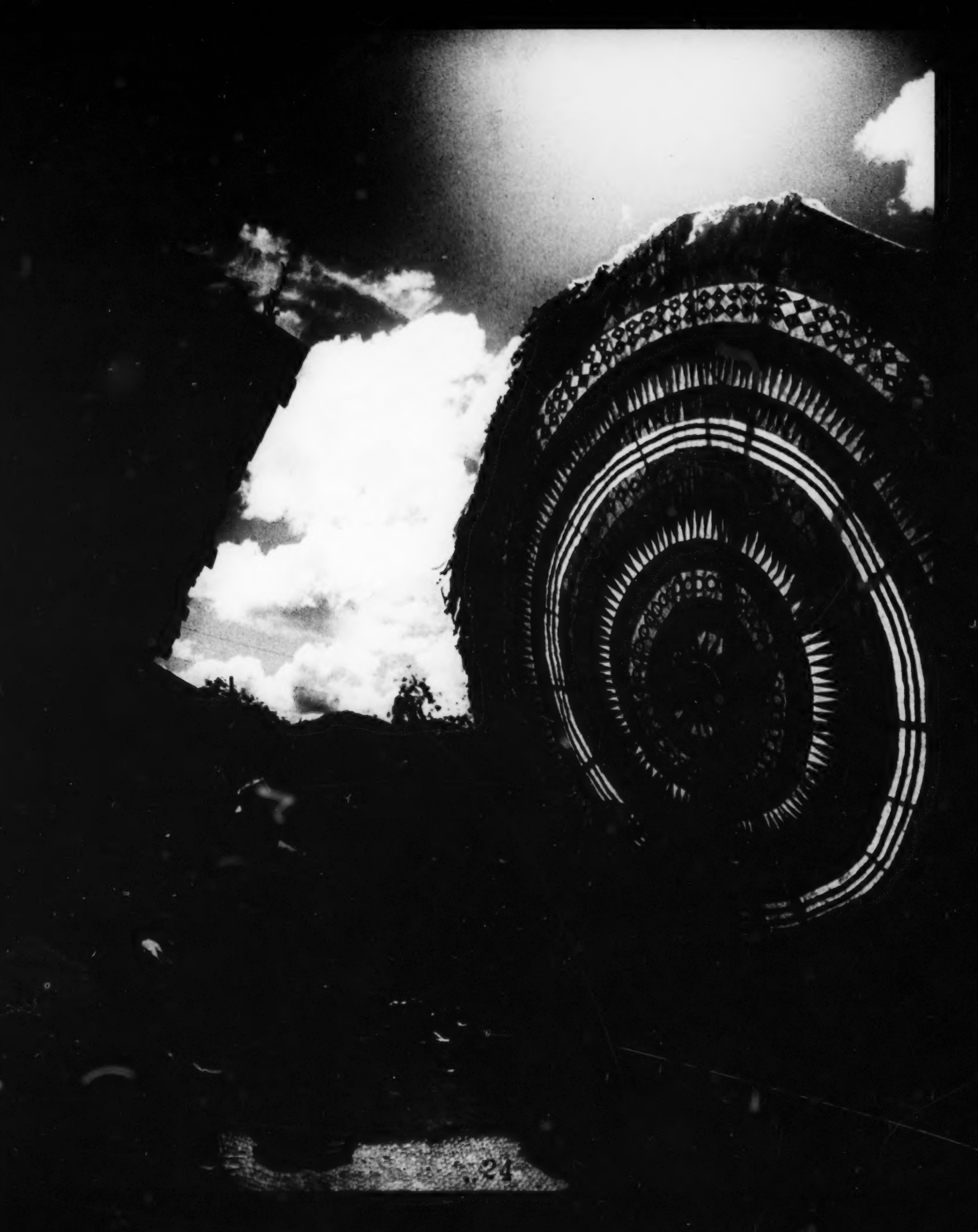
Other kinds of rituals are held by the community for the community. They are usually public events designed to unite members of the community in their shared beliefs and reaffirm their ties with each other as followers of a particular faith.

Celebrating the Dead

Many cultures believe that the spirits of the dead can influence the living, and so the dead must be remembered and respected. In Mexico and Central and South America, as well as in some Mexican communities in the United States, festivities in memory of the dead are held on the Catholic holy days of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (November 1 and 2). It is believed that on these days, the souls of the departed return to the earthly world to visit with their living relatives. The most spectacular of these celebrations take place in the village communities of Mexico on *El Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of the Dead.

Mexican families prepare long in advance for this important occasion. Colorful altars, or *ofrendas*, are made with care by family members and placed in homes or churchyards in honor of the departed. On these *ofrendas* are placed flowers, candles, figures of saints, and offerings of food and drink whose fragrance the spirits will enjoy.

The Catholic traditions found in the Day of the Dead are mixed with indigenous beliefs surrounding death. Long before European contact in the sixteenth century, death was an important theme in the lives of native peoples of Mexico and Central America. They believed that death, like all things, was controlled by the gods, who could either favor the people or punish them. In order to please the gods, the people held ceremonies, some of which included sacrificing humans or animals. In addition to rituals and ceremonies addressing the mystery and power of death, images of death could be found in paintings, sculpture, and poetry. This poetry suggests that death was viewed as being the "real" world, and the life we lead only a dream. Today, the descendants of these peoples continue to have a comfortable relationship with death, as expressed in the Day of the Dead celebration and surrounding rituals.



...the souls of the dead are flown during
...de Sacatepeques, Guatemala.

Bob Luna Speaks About the Art of Celebrating the Dead

"I have always been interested in my Chicano heritage and traditions. I was raised Catholic and, unlike my Mexican-born grandparents and great-grandparents, I did not celebrate the traditional Mexican Day of the Dead. Once I began to learn more about it, I immediately recognized many things from my Catholic upbringing: crosses, *velas* (candles), incense burners, and especially the pictures of our dead relatives, which reminded me of the photographs I used to see in my grandparents' homes.



- An elaborate, hand-painted altar and mural—painted by Bob Luna and his students—stand as part of a Day of the Dead celebration in Denver, Colorado, in the United States.

"In 1982, I and some friends held a Day of the Dead celebration in northwest Denver, our predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood. It's an annual celebration and art show now. Each year on November 2, more than 300 people celebrate and learn about Day of the Dead. Everybody looks forward to this day because we get to visit with the spirits of our loved ones.

"First, everyone gathers at our neighborhood art co-op, known as Pirate, for a night-time procession in the streets. Many people carry candles and noisemakers, while others come dressed as *escaletas* (skeletons) or carry *escaletas* puppets. Usually, a band leads everybody in songs as we march to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. There, we stop and call out the names of those who have recently died, welcoming their spirits. This is the



• Two young Mexican Americans pose with handmade skeleton masks made for a Day of the Dead festival.

solemn time, when we hold hands and say a prayer for our friends and relatives. Afterwards, we walk back to Pirate for the fiesta. We have coffee, hot chocolate, tamales, and *pan de muerto* ("dead bread") and then, it's time for the piñatas! The children's piñata is filled with candy, while the adults' piñata usually makes fun of a politician and has candy and jokes inside. Soon the band comes back and everybody dances and parties through the night.

"Our Day of the Dead celebration and education workshops are open to

the public. Since we began this annual tradition, thousands of people have celebrated with us and visited our art show, featuring traditional altars, offerings, and *escaletas*, as well as contemporary interpretations of death. I especially look forward to it because Day of the Dead is like a bridge for people of other cultures to learn more about my neighborhood's Mexican heritage."

— Bob Luna is an artist and art teacher in Denver.



• Adults and children gather in Denver for a nighttime remembrance of dead relatives.

The Day of the Dead is celebrated with music, feasting, prayer, and good cheer. It is a time of joy and reunion and is a celebration of the family as well as the community. In addition to the rituals in their homes, families join each other in the churches and the cemeteries as they light candles and feast by the graves of their loved ones. Children enjoy special treats of sugar skulls, animals, crosses, and other shapes, each with the name of the child written on it in candy ink. Parades of people in skeleton masks carrying fake coffins march through the village streets while bands play happy music. This is a time for the

- Families gather at a cemetery in Puno, Peru, to pray and make offerings during their Day of the Dead celebration.



living to celebrate death as a natural part of life and, as a community, to support each other's belief in the afterlife.

Like the Mexicans, many Chinese families who have migrated to the Americas also have a ritual to honor their deceased loved ones. This ritual is a private communal event, performed by families in the home. As was traditionally the custom in China, family members honor the spirits of their grandparents or parents by keeping a tablet with the deceased relatives' names on it. This tablet is usually set on a small table. On the anniversaries of a relative's birth and death, family members light incense and candles in front of the tablet and offer food and prayers. Showing respect in this way is believed to please the spirits of the dead, who, it is hoped, will continue to bestow good fortune on their living children and grandchildren.

Holding On to Traditions

Because religion brings individuals within a culture together, it is one way in which a culture can express its identity. In places where new religions were forced upon them, indigenous peoples sometimes combined the new religion with their traditional practices, as shown by the Day of the Dead celebrations in the Americas. In other places, religious practices were either completely disguised or were forced "underground," meaning that they could be practiced only in secret.

When African slaves, for example, were brought to the Americas beginning in the early 1600s, they maintained close ties to their cultures in Africa by continuing to practice their spiritual traditions. In Africa, these traditions had included belief in a variety of spirits, including nature spirits and the spirits of ancestors. In the Americas, however, the slaves had to disguise these traditions so as not to anger the slave owners, who forced Christianity on them. They did so by giving their African spirits the identities of Christian saints.

From this cultural adaptation developed new religious traditions, which are still practiced today in parts of the Caribbean, South America, and the United States. They include Santaria in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Candomble and Umbanda sects of



- A dancer (center) is moved by spirit possession during a ceremony in Belem, Brazil.

the Macumba religion in Brazil, and Vodou (known commonly as "Voodoo") in Haiti and the southern United States. In Brazil, indigenous spirits have been added to the collection of African spirits and Christian saints.

Spirits in the Vodou religion are called by the Haitian name of *loa*. As with other African-derived religions, Vodou rituals are held to call upon the *loa* for help and problem-solving. To

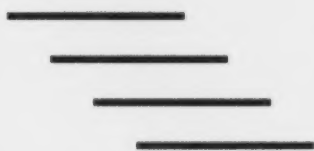
the sound of drums and singing, followers dance and offer food to the loa. During the rituals, the loa are believed to visit and perhaps to "borrow" the bodies of some of those present in order to communicate with them. The person whose body is borrowed is said to be "possessed" by the spirit and he or she takes on the spirit's personality. Spirit possession is found in many religions, including traditional African, traditional Balinese, Native American, and some Christian religions in the United States, such as the Holiness Church.

Most followers of Vodou consider themselves to be Catholic, and they accept the identity of Catholic saints in the loa given by their ancestors as a means of fooling slave owners. For example, the loa Erzulie Freda is also recognized as the Virgin Mary. Every July 16, at a holy place in Haiti called Saut d'Eau, followers pray beneath the healing waters of a one-hundred-foot waterfall to Erzulie Freda/the Virgin Mary to receive strength and good health.

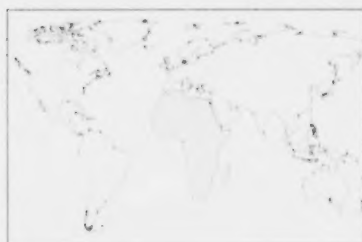
Just as slavery forced Africans to disguise their spiritual practices in the Americas, early government policy forced many native practices to go underground. When Europeans brought Christianity to the Americas and began setting up missions, they expected Native Americans to adopt this new religion. In some places, native religious practices were outlawed. But the indigenous peoples held on to what little traditions they could, and many continued to practice their rituals in secret. Later, when the laws banning Native-American practices were changed, some of the spiritual practices were revived. Today, these religious traditions thrive in Native-American communities across the United States and Canada. The use of the sweat lodge as a purification ritual, the reciting of traditional prayers in Native-American languages, and the performance of sacred ceremonies like the Sun Dance of the Plains peoples are some of the many Native-American spiritual traditions, once outlawed, that continue today. The longevity and survival of these practices are due to the individuals who, in the past, placed themselves in danger by secretly keeping the traditions alive, though under threat of severe punishment.



3



Africa



The African continent is a vast region of almost infinite variety—both in terms of geography and in terms of culture. Cultural groups in many parts of Africa continue to practice their indigenous spiritual

ways. Traditional African religions recognize many kinds of supernatural beings, ghosts, and spirits, some of whom are the people's ancestors. Often, African peoples have sacred places to which they go, such as a special waterfall or tree, where rituals and ceremonies are held. Traditional African religions are closely tied to the land and to nature, where it is believed many of the spirits dwell.

In addition to indigenous practices, two of today's most important religions in Africa were introduced long ago from

- A traditional healer in Tanzania sits among the many tools he uses in his practice.



● Christians take part in a baptism ceremony in rural South Africa.

outside the continent: Christianity and Islam. Christianity grew up in the area around Palestine, where Jesus Christ lived about 2,000 years ago. From there it spread to North Africa, Ethiopia, and Egypt in the first 500 years after Christ's death. In the seventh century, invading armies from Arabia brought Islam to North Africa, where it virtually replaced Christianity. The original churches in North Africa were destroyed, leaving churches only in Egypt and Ethiopia.

After Islam was introduced by the military, it later spread to other parts of Africa through trade. As peoples came in contact with one another to do business, Islamic practices were introduced and adopted by many. From North Africa, Islam spread to West Africa in the eleventh century, and to many areas south of the Sahara Desert by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the fifteenth century, Christianity was once again spread by European missionaries traveling to the continent in the hope of converting all non-Christians to Christianity. True missions

in Africa, however, were not established until the nineteenth century. Since then, Africans themselves have become leaders of their churches and have established Christian churches of their own. Today, there are about the same number of Christians in Africa as there are Muslims. In addition, Jewish communities have developed in parts of the continent, including Ethiopia, Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa.

Entering the Spiritual Community

In most cultures, religious and spiritual teachings are, among many things, guidelines for how to be a respectable person. The rules laid out for proper religious behavior are often the same as those expected for proper social behavior. These rules, and the proper methods of observing them, are often taught formally by elders of the community and the recognized religious leaders. As is true for Judaism's bar and bat mitzvahs, the Yanomami shamans of Brazil, and the Communion and Confirmation practices of Catholicism, rules of life and religion are mastered in stages.



- A muezzin (crier) on Mozambique Island, Mozambique, calls the Islamic faithful to prayer.

Learning Personhood

All Muslims—followers of the Islamic faith—turn to the Koran for guidance in how to be a proper person. The Koran is a book of holy scripture that Muslims believe to be the word of Allah, or God, given to the Prophet Muhammad so that he could bring it to the people. The Koran is very specific about which practices Muslims should or should not participate in.

Muslim children learn from an early age the boundaries of acceptable behavior within their communities. Often this behavior is defined around gender lines—it is different for males and females. In the many regions of Africa, however, these practices vary. Many Muslim women, for example, wear a veil over their faces as a sign of modesty when in public. In some cultures, however—as among the Berber of the Sahara region—this custom is not practiced.

Besides the wearing of the veil, Islamic custom also requires that men and women remain separate much of the time. Among the Muslim Hausa of Nigeria, men and women stay in their own separate quarters, and women are hidden from men who are not part of the immediate family. The domain of women is the household, and they rarely leave it. In other areas, like Morocco, some Muslim women hold professional jobs and are in contact with men every day.

In Africa, Senegal is one of the countries whose dominant religion is Islam. In this country, almost all Muslims follow Sufism, a sect of Islam. The leaders of the various Sufi groups are called marabouts. These men are known for being wise, holy people with special mystical powers. They play an important role in the everyday lives of followers of the religion. Pictures of marabouts are found in people's homes, in marketplaces, and on buses. A Senegalese will usually go to a marabout for help, advice, or blessings, and when there are special events, such as ceremonies and funerals, marabouts are invited to participate.

In cultures where traditional African spirituality is practiced, young people (especially boys) learn proper behavior by undergoing initiation rituals. Initiation usually takes place at the



- Young women and elders from a village in Gabon participate in an initiation rite of puberty.

time of puberty. At that time, boys are taken from their villages and brought out to the surrounding countryside. There they learn from elders all they need to know in order to be responsible adults, including the spiritual teachings of the community. Often, leaders will wear sacred masks that represent various spirits during these ceremonies. The spirits can then directly instruct the young people by speaking through the leaders who wear the masks.

As with the Jewish bar and bat mitzvahs and the Catholic First Holy Communion and Confirmation, African initiation rituals prepare a young person to become a responsible adult. In African spirituality, everyday life is intertwined with spiritual teachings. Daily activities are believed to be greatly influenced by spirits and supernatural beings. A boy, for example, learns the spiritual teachings of his culture—including how properly to respect the spirits of his ancestors—while also learning the practical things he will need to know as an adult.

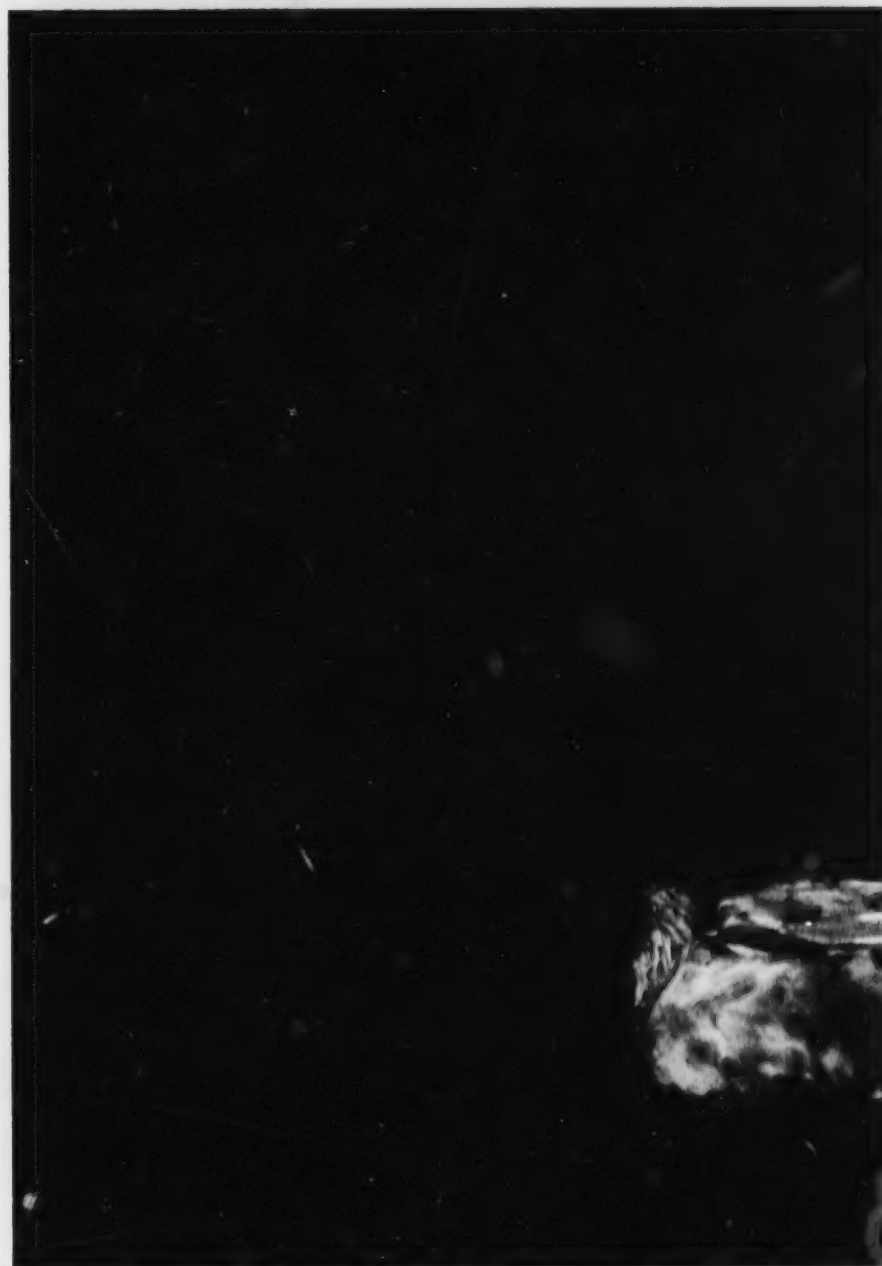
Community Rituals and Celebrations

Community rituals and ceremonies are often joyous occasions. Sometimes, however, community members are called together to support one another in times of great struggle or despair. A death in the community is one of the most common of these trying times. Death is a time of stress in a community, when normal daily life is interrupted by a sad event. When death occurs, special rituals and ceremonies are held, not only as a sign of respect for the deceased, but also as a form of comfort for those who are grieving and must go on with life. Most cultures around the world believe in some form of an afterlife. Rituals of death help to remind people of that belief, and in so doing, they help to take away some of the fear of the unknown that still awaits the living.

A Reunion of Spirits

In many African cultures that practice traditional ways, at the time of death, an individual is believed to join the world of the ancestors. The spirit of the ancestors must be honored, just as the Mexicans honor their dead during the Day of the Dead festival and the Chinese honor their dead by setting up ancestor tablets. In many African cultures—as with the Mexicans and the Chinese—ancestors are believed to keep watch over their living relatives, and offer help and guidance as well as punishment for sins. Offerings of food and drink are usually made to the deceased, and sometimes an infant is given the name of a relative who has recently died.

Among the Lugbara of Uganda, as in many African cultures, death rituals are large community affairs that can often last for days and even weeks. In Lugbara society, death rituals begin with the formal burying of the dead, followed by ritual dances held to the sound of drumming and singing. In certain cases, it is believed that the person who died was unhappy at the time of death, and, consequently, amends have to be made. When this happens, a diviner (a person who has the power to speak with the dead) is called upon to contact the "soul" of the deceased,



- A high priestess in the ancient religion of the Yoruba prepares a ceremonial site in Nigeria.

which is believed to have gone up into the sky. Once the soul is contacted, it is summoned back to Earth, where it becomes a ghost and visits special shrines built for it by living relatives.

Although all persons who die become ancestors, not all of them become ghosts. Ghost shrines are important to the

Lugbara because they believe that ghosts can cause sickness for the living if a relative does something to cause problems in the family. But there are ancestor shrines as well. Family members offer food and beer at both the ancestor and ghost shrines to please the dead and to let them know they are remembered.

Similarly, the Malagasy of Madagascar fashion family tombs with great care from strong, durable cement. The tomb is considered by the Malagasy people to be the ancestor's home, and it must be cared for as a sacred place. According to the Malagasy, all good things come from the ancestors, and so they must be properly respected. Tombs are usually decorated with carvings, and are often painted. Sometimes, on special occasions, an ancestor's bones are removed from the tomb as part of a community ritual and carried in a procession to please the departed relative. Afterwards, the bones are reburied.

Like the Lugbara and the Malagasy, other cultures throughout Africa have special rituals and ceremonies to respect the ancestors. Some of the Yoruba of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo still maintain their traditional spiritual ways, although most are now Christian or Muslim. Yoruba religion recognizes four levels of spirits, beginning with a Supreme Being. One of these levels recognizes ancestors who have become spirits with great power. Among these ancestor spirits is a being known as Egungun. A ceremony is held for Egungun in which, after the celebrating village has been purified with medicines, masked dancers whirl about in cloth costumes that cover their entire bodies. It is believed that Egungun actually visits with the living during this ceremony held in his honor.

Like the Yoruba, and like many indigenous peoples of the Americas, many cultures in Africa maintain their traditional ways while practicing other religions. The Dyula of Burkina Faso, for example, have converted to Islam. But when the Dyula celebrate the Muslim season of Ramadan, they often include traditional African music and dance as part of the month-long holiday rituals.

In Ethiopia, too, certain beliefs are rooted in traditional African spirituality, but they do not conflict with the other

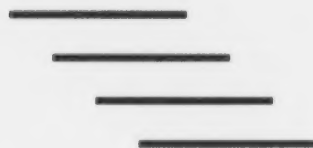


- Young Christians in Ethiopia read a passage from the Bible as part of an Easter ritual.

religions that people follow. Most people in Ethiopia today are Christians. Many others are Muslims, and still others practice Judaism, although most Ethiopian Jews now live in Israel.

One of the most important celebrations held today in Ethiopia by followers of the Orthodox Christian Church is Timket. This is the holy day of Epiphany, the day Jesus Christ was baptized. On the day of the celebration, children wear new clothes and join the rest of the community in following a bright, colorful procession that begins at the church. The procession is led by the head priest, who carries a cloth-covered box that represents the Ark of the Covenant (an ornate container that holds the original writings of the Old Testament). Behind him are altar boys, musicians, and more priests, carrying umbrellas and large crosses. The procession lasts until evening, when the box is placed by a pool, symbolic of the water used in baptism, and guarded by the priests until the next morning. Then, there is more celebrating with music and dancing as people come to the pool to be blessed and to have their babies baptized. The procession then returns the box to the church, and everyone continues the celebration at home.





Europe and the Middle East



The major religions of Europe and the Middle East are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three of these belief systems developed in the Middle East and eventually spread throughout the world. Of

the three, Judaism is the oldest, dating back at least 4,000 years. Christianity is almost 2,000 years old, and Islam dates back about 1,300 years.

Although these three are very different religious systems, they do share certain important elements. All of them have the same roots: Christianity developed out of Judaism, and Islam was influenced by both Judaism and Christianity. Each faith

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- Opposite: A group of Muslim women leaves the sacred Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Israel.

recognizes the existence of a single God who created the universe and all living things and who is all-powerful. This God is the same for all three religions, although He is called by different names in each: Yahweh or Adonai in Judaism, God the Father in Christianity, and Allah in Islam.

All three religions also have sacred writings, or scriptures, to which the followers of these faiths turn for guidance, instruction, and inspiration. These are the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament), the Christian Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments), and the Muslim Koran. Each of these scriptures, it is believed, is the word of God given to the people, and so it must be followed as written.

Entering the Spiritual Community

Most cultures and, hence, most religions have special ceremonies and rituals to mark important stages of life. Most often, these stages are defined as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. In many cultures throughout the world, when a child is born, a special ceremony is held so the community can recognize that a new member has arrived. Often, these ceremonies have a religious or spiritual nature.

Birth Rituals

In Judaism, the religious ceremony associated with the birth of a boy is the *bris*, which takes place when the infant is eight days old. The *bris* recalls an event that is significant in Jewish history: It is believed that long ago, God asked the prophet Abraham to sacrifice Abraham's only son, Isaac, and Abraham agreed because his faith in God was so strong. Seeing Abraham's faith, God saved Isaac and made an agreement with Abraham called a covenant. The covenant was that Abraham and his descendants would worship and obey only God, and God would bless Abraham and his descendants. God commanded that circumcision of all Jewish males would be the sign of this covenant.

During the *bris* (which means "covenant"), attended by family and close friends, the foreskin from the Jewish infant's penis

is removed in a procedure called circumcision. This event is said to bind the child to God and to Israel, just as Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son led to his binding agreement with God.

The prayers and rituals of the *bris* are basically the same wherever Judaism is practiced, but there are certain variations around the world. For example, Jews living in Western Europe, known as the Ashkenazim, practice a custom not found anywhere else. Among the Ashkenazim, a child is circumcised on a piece of clean, unbleached cloth called a wimple. After the ceremony, this cloth is torn into strips and sewn together to form one long strip. On the strip are embroidered the child's name, birth date, zodiac sign, and a blessing that the child should grow up and lead a good, successful life.

When the child goes to the synagogue for the first time, his family brings the strip. It is publicly placed around the Torah, an important, sacred scroll that contains the religious laws followed by all Jews. In this way, as the *bris* symbolically binds the child to God and His laws, the cloth strip physically binds the scrolls of the Torah together.

Ritual circumcision is also practiced in Muslim communities, although among some Muslims, a boy is circumcised at a later age, between the ages of three and seven years. As with the *bris*, it is a time of celebration with family and friends at which prayers and verses from the Koran are recited. Before that, when a Muslim child is a week old, a naming ceremony is held for him. Naming ceremonies are held in most societies around the world, including African and Native-American cultures, among others. In Christianity, a child usually receives his or her name upon baptism.

As ritual circumcision and naming ceremonies introduce Jewish and Muslim boys into their communities, the ceremony of baptism, or the christening, introduces the Christian child into the religious community. Christian baptism is held for girls as well as boys. In most Christian religions, baptism occurs when a child is still an infant.

Although the various Christian religions each perform baptism differently, the ceremony has the same basic elements



- An infant receives a ritual baptism during a Russian Orthodox ceremony in Moscow, Russia.

everywhere. Before the ceremony, the parents choose a man and a woman to be godparents to their child. These people, along with the child's parents, vow to help the child in his or her religious education as the child grows up. The godparents act as role models, as the religious elders, and share a special bond with their godchild for the rest of their lives. During the ceremony, they also make vows of loyalty to God on behalf of the child.

An important part of the baptism is when the priest or minister pours a small amount of water over the baby's head. Like the Jewish bris recalls an important event in Jewish history, the anointing of baptism recalls an important event in Christian history: During the time of Christ, John the Baptist traveled about spreading Jesus's teachings. As people converted, he washed them in the Jordan River, symbolically washing away their mortal sins. Christians believe that all people are born with "original sin"—that is, all humans are born "impure," because they carry the legacy of sin brought about by Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, when they disobeyed God's wishes. When a baby is baptized, it is believed that he or she is

cleansed of original sin. With this cleansing, the child is born again into the church and is now a recognized member of the religious community.

The baptism, like ritual circumcision and naming ceremonies around the world, is a happy occasion, a cause for celebrating with family and friends.

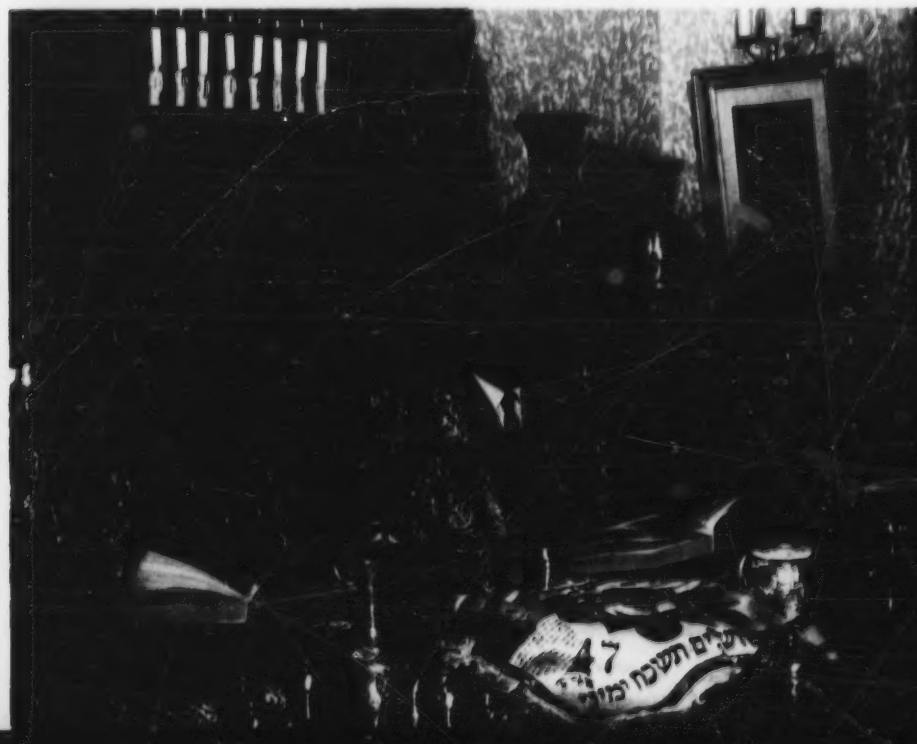
Community Rituals and Celebrations

Some religious celebrations are well-known holidays and festivals around the world. Often they are seasonal events lasting several days.

Holidays and Festivals

In Jewish communities, Passover is celebrated annually in the spring. This holiday celebrates the release of the Jews from Egyptian slavery long ago. On the first two nights of Passover, a Seder is held. The Seder is a special dinner and ceremony in which the story of the Jews' exodus (departure) from Egypt is told. On the Seder table are specific foods that recall various aspects of the story.

- A Bukharian family (from Uzbekistan) celebrates a Passover Seder around an elaborately decorated table in Jerusalem, Israel.



Toward the beginning of the Seder, one of the children asks four questions about the night of Passover. The rest of the Seder is structured to answer the questions, thus teaching the younger members of the family about Jewish history and religious practice. In Europe and North America, it is usually the youngest child at the Seder who asks the questions. In the Middle East, it is usually the oldest, and the youngest child answers them. As the story of Passover is discussed, everyone at the dinner table joins in telling the story and in singing songs.

Passover is an important holiday because it brings family and friends together and reminds Jewish people of an important part of their history. Among Muslims, the celebration of Ramadan marks an important event in Islamic history. Ramadan is the name of the ninth month on the Islamic calendar. It was during this month, Muslims believe, that the Koran was given to Muhammad by Allah. During Ramadan, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. This fasting is a form of sacrifice to Allah. It is also believed to be a time of purification and

• Joyful men in Cairo, Egypt, celebrate with song and dance during the month-long Muslim festival of Ramadan.



Carol Weiskopf Recalls the Festival of Santa Lucia



• A young Swedish girl, dressed as Santa Lucia.

"My grandmother Louise told me many stories about growing up in Arvika, Sweden. Her eyes would sparkle when she told me about the year she was chosen to be Santa Lucia for the festival on December 13. Legend tells us that long ago, there was a great famine in Sweden and all the people were hungry. During that cold and dark winter, on the shortest day of the year (Sweden followed the Julian calendar then, and the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, fell on December 13), the people had lost all hope until they saw

a brightly lighted ship with a beautiful young girl sailing across Lake Vannern. The ship was filled with food and saved the lives of the Swedish people. This tradition of life and hope has been celebrated ever since—the long dark days of winter will be followed by the light and bounty of summer.

"On that December 13, when my grandmother took the part of Santa Lucia, she got up very early in the morning to prepare for this special occasion. She dressed all in white and combed her long blond hair before putting on the Lucia crown. Because Santa Lucia is associated with light, the crown was ringed with candles. Her brother Oscar carefully lit each of these candles. Then she filled a tray with cups of steaming coffee and special saffron buns and cakes. Walking slowly, she carried the tray to her parents. That year, Santa Lucia Day fell on a Sunday, and after the family had eaten the special treats, they walked together through the darkness of the winter morning to the Lutheran church. My grandmother didn't even notice the cold because she was so proud and happy about the special part she had played that day."

self-discipline. At night, though, people eat and drink, and join together to celebrate with festivities.

The practice of fasting for religious reasons is common to many spiritual traditions around the world, including, among others, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the indigenous traditions of the Americas. By placing the physical needs of the body aside, a person is better able to focus on his or her sense of spirituality. In the Jewish religion, Yom Kippur is a holy day on which an individual takes time to reflect on his or her spiritual life and deeds. On this day, Jews fast for a period of twenty-four hours.

During the Christian Lenten season, many people do not eat meat and often give up eating some other foods they enjoy. Lent marks the time just before Easter, when, Christians believe, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Before the fasting of Lent begins, a period of merrymaking is celebrated in many places. This period, known in Italy as *Carnivale*, originated in Venice in the fifteenth century. Today, it is celebrated much the same as in the past, with everyone from the smallest children to adults dressing up in elaborate costumes and masks. There are parades, parties, puppet shows, and all kinds of entertainment in the squares and the streets. This kind of grand, pre-Lenten celebration is also found in Brazil and the Caribbean, where it is known as *Carnival*. New Orleans, in the United States, holds a similar celebration, called *Mardi Gras*.

Carnivale is a time for the entire city of Venice to celebrate, drawing crowds from all over the world. (*Carnivale* is also celebrated in other parts of Italy, although not as elaborately.) It is a grand affair that brings together many visitors from many communities. But throughout Europe are many smaller religious holidays celebrated by individual communities. Towns and villages, for example, often have a special patron saint who the people feel is watching over their particular community. Usually, a day is set aside to honor the saint, and on that day, the people celebrate with a procession through the streets, carrying an image of the saint. In addition, there are prayers in the village church, followed by feasting.

- Opposite: A masquerader takes a break from the festivities of *Carnivale* near the Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy.



Sometimes a patron saint is honored in a different way. In Sweden, for example, the celebration of Santa Lucia, held on December 13, is less a time for honoring the Sicilian saint than it is for honoring an old tradition with religious roots. The Swedish custom of Santa Lucia Day is for the eldest daughter of the household to wear a crown of pine boughs ringed with lighted candles and to serve her family coffee and special home-made buns, called Lucia buns.

Sacred Places

In many cultures, people often recognize special places that are considered to be especially holy. Sometimes it is because an important event was said to have happened at that place. Sometimes it is believed to be the dwelling place of spirits or supernatural beings. Often, people will make a journey, or pilgrimage, to the place to pray. Among Muslims, the journey is called the Hajj, and the holy place is Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

At Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad, is the Sacred Mosque. All Muslims who are physically able, and who can afford it, are expected to visit Mecca and the Sacred Mosque at least once in their lifetime. Each year during the pilgrimage season (the tenth to the twelfth months of the Muslim calendar), hundreds of thousands—sometimes millions—of people

- Thousands of Muslims gather at the large mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, for nighttime prayer.





- Left: Christians fill the plaza at Fatima in Portugal. Right: The Pope celebrates mass with thousands of fellow Catholics at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy.

visit Mecca on the sacred journey. Here, dressed in simple white clothes, the followers pray, meditate, and visit certain places in the city. This journey is important because it reaffirms Muslims' ties with Allah. It also allows them to bond with other Muslims from around the world.

In Portugal, the town of Fatima is a holy place for Christians. Here, on May 13, 1917, it is believed that three shepherd children out tending their flocks were visited by the Virgin Mary. It is said that the Virgin Mary spoke to them, and she returned on the thirteenth day of each month for five more months. A church was built on the site where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared. Each year, on the thirteenth day of each month from May to October, hundreds of thousands of Christians from all over the world journey to Fatima to pray. A special visit for children, the Annual National Children's Pilgrimage, occurs on June 10 and is a reminder of the three shepherd children.



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Asia



Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam can all be found throughout Asia today. Both Hinduism and Buddhism, two of Asia's most important religions, originated in Asia, where they are still practiced

by many people today. Hinduism developed in India probably about 3,000 years ago, although there is no written record that traces its origins. Followers of Hinduism believe in a cycle of reincarnation (the return of the soul after death in another body). According to this belief, whether a person's next life will be happy or full of hardship will depend on whether he or she performs good deeds in this life.

Buddhism also began in India, in the sixth century B.C. This religion is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as Buddha, meaning "the Enlightened

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- Opposite: Children light lamps at a Buddhist shrine in Anuradapura, Sri Lanka.

One." Buddhist philosophy teaches that humans suffer because of their desire for pleasure and material things, and that true happiness comes to those who give up these desires and lead a purely spiritual life.

In Japan, Shinto was the original, ancient religion shared by all Japanese until Buddhism was introduced. Shinto is based on the belief that in all living things dwell supernatural forces, called *kami*, which must be respected and honored. Today in Japan, both Shinto and Buddhism are practiced (sometimes simultaneously). Other religions, including Christianity, are followed as well.

In China, Buddhism and other religions were followed until the Communist regime, which came to power in 1949, banned religious practices. Today, however, the Chinese government is more tolerant of religion, and Buddhist temples are springing up again. Christian churches have also begun to appear.

Entering the Spiritual Community

In cultures around the globe, people seek both good health and blessings from the spiritual world. Sometimes this request is a prayer; sometimes it means wearing a special amulet or charm to ward off evil. The birth of a child is a universal, joyous occasion that prompts rituals designed to give thanks and ensure health and safety for the child's future.

Asking for Blessings

In the Shinto religion of Japan, blessings come from the *kami*, which are believed to live in all natural things, such as plants, rocks, and waterfalls. People go to Shinto shrines to pray to the *kami*. Weddings also take place at a shrine, and when a child is born, parents take the child to a shrine to be blessed.

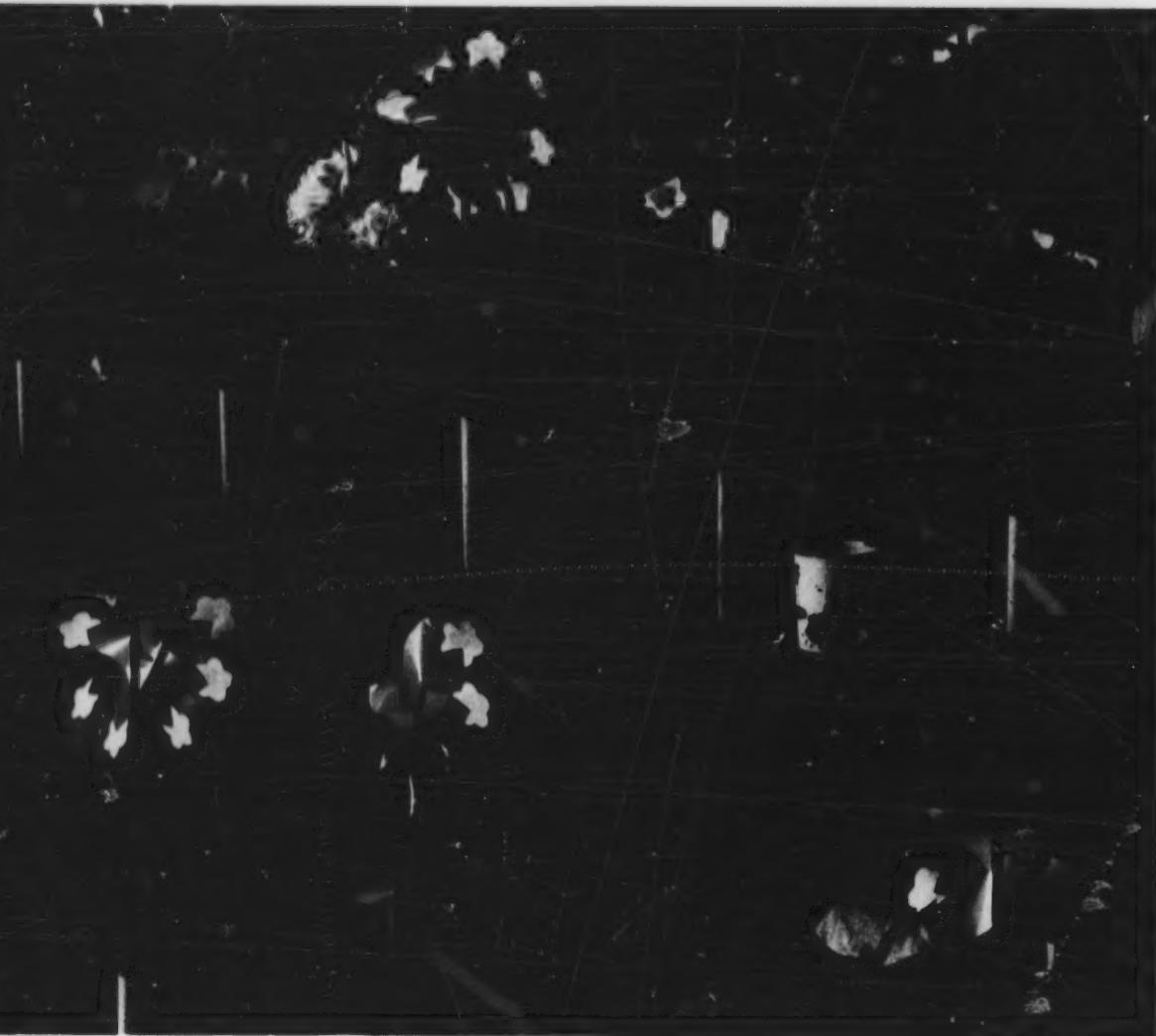
Another ritual for children, called *shichi-go-san*, or Seven-Five-Three Day, happens each year on November 15. This is a day when five-year-old boys and seven-year-old and three-year-old girls visit local Shinto shrines with their parents. At the shrines, the family prays to the *kami* for the children's

good health and blessings. Outside the shrine, vendors sell sticks of "thousand-year candy." It is said that eating this candy brings a thousand years of good fortune to the children. Back in their homes, the families celebrate with parties and gifts for the children.

In many cultures, parents put symbols on their children's clothing or cradles that are believed to protect the young ones from evil forces and bring them good health and a long life. In China, for example, children wear small Buddhas of gold or jade as protective charms, as well as the figure of the God of Longevity. Also, animals like the tiger, lion, and rooster—believed to be capable of scaring off demons—are embroidered onto children's clothing. Chinese children sometimes wear caps in the shape of a tiger's head, and sleep on pillows made in the shape of a double-headed tiger's body, as other ways to keep away evil spirits.

● India's faithful bathe and pray in the sacred waters of the Ganges River at sunrise.





- A shrine for unborn children in Tokyo, Japan, is adorned with colorful flowers and pinwheels.

In Korea, women who hope to become pregnant pray to the spirit samshin halmoni. Samshin halmoni is believed to be responsible for a child's birth as well as the child's health and well-being after it is born. When the child becomes one hundred days old, the parents usually host a celebration. The festivities begin with offerings of rice and soup to the samshin halmoni, as thanks for taking care of the child and his or her mother since the baby's birth. After the offerings, the family celebrates with relatives and friends, serving foods such as rice cakes, wine, and sweet bean cakes.

Community Rituals and Celebrations

In many cultures, important aspects of religion are expressed in people's art. Not only is the end product—the art itself—often an expression of the religious devotion of the artist, but the process of creating the art is also considered to be a sacred act and a form of worship or prayer.

Creative Ways to Worship

Dancing as a form of prayerful expression is found in religious traditions around the world, including Native American, native Hawaiian, and Korean Buddhist, among others. In India, too, dance is sacred among Hindu peoples as a form of worship. The Hindu religion recognizes many gods and goddesses. Hindus believe that the gods enjoy watching humans dance, so dance is performed to please them. When a Hindu dance is performed, the dancers often reenact stories about the adventures of the gods and goddesses. Wearing colorful costumes, dramatic make-up, and splendid jewelry, the dancers use graceful gestures and facial expressions to perform the stories.

The largest Hindu population outside of India is on the island of Bali, in Indonesia. Here, too, dance is performed to please the gods, although the colorful costumes worn are distinctly Balinese rather than Indian. Sometimes the dances enact the legendary adventures of Hindu deities; sometimes they tell stories of traditional Indonesian ancestors, gods, and heroes. Balinese children are very active in these performances, and often begin learning the dances as early as age six years. As in India, Balinese dance is often performed in temples, although today, both forms are also done as artistic performances on stages around the world.

An important traditional dance drama of Bali enacts the battle between two supernatural beings: Barong, the dragonlike spirit who protects the villagers, and Rangda, the evil witch. The performance usually takes place in a plaza outside a temple. There, masked dancers dressed as Barong and Rangda battle each other. Other dancers support Barong, waving knives at



- Dancers in elaborate costumes perform the Barong and Rangda dance in Bali, Indonesia.

the witch. Sometimes during the performance, dancers go into trances, which is common in Balinese religion. While the dancers are in a trance, they are believed to be possessed by spirits. At the end of the performance, the witch is defeated, but not killed.

This is just one of the several kinds of dramas that are performed in Indonesia to get rid of evil spirits. Often, this form of dance is performed in Balinese villages that are suffering from problems such as sickness, poor weather, or other misfortunes. By defeating the witch in the drama, Barong is believed to restore harmony to the entire community.

In Bali and the Indonesian island of Java, dramas are also enacted in shadow-puppet performances, called *wayang*. As in dance dramas, the puppets enact the stories of Hindu and traditional Indonesian gods and heroes. The brightly painted, flat

puppets are usually made of stiff leather (sometimes wood in Java), with rods for handles. The *dalang*, the person who controls the puppets, sits with an oil lamp behind a cloth screen. As the puppets enact the stories, the lamp causes the puppets to appear as shadows to the audience. Before the performance, the *dalang* traditionally says prayers and makes offerings of incense to the supernatural forces. It is believed that during a wayang performed in the traditional ritual way, everyone in the audience is protected from harm for as long as the performance lasts. Some even believe that the puppets themselves become possessed by the gods they represent. Although the wayang has religious significance, it, like dance dramas, is often performed worldwide as a form of theater entertainment.

Religious Objects of Beauty

Besides the performing arts, religious worship around the world also takes the form of creating beautiful objects, like sculptures and paintings. Some of the most magnificent art in the world is sacred or religious art, including Renaissance art of Europe, sacred masks of Africa, and totem carvings and paintings of the South Pacific. In Asia, the Buddhist monks of Tibet are known the world over for their exquisite creations made of sand, called *mandalas*. The monks are also renowned for their skill in carving wonderfully ornate butter sculptures, which is another way they show their faith.

The Buddhist mandala is a circular drawing or painting decorated with sacred images. It is often used as an object on which to focus during meditation, and small ones may be carried as protection. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the intricate designs of the sand mandala are made by sprinkling colored sand on a base of either wood or another hard surface. As the mandala is finished, a monk chants over the painting, calling on specific Buddhist deities to enter the painting and make it holy. With further prayer, the sand mandala is then taken apart and brought to a river into which the monks pour the sand. (Similarly, among the Navajo of the American Southwest, medicine men create sand paintings while calling



- A Hindu worshipper bows before a giant statue of the god Nandi at the Bull Temple in Bangalore, India.

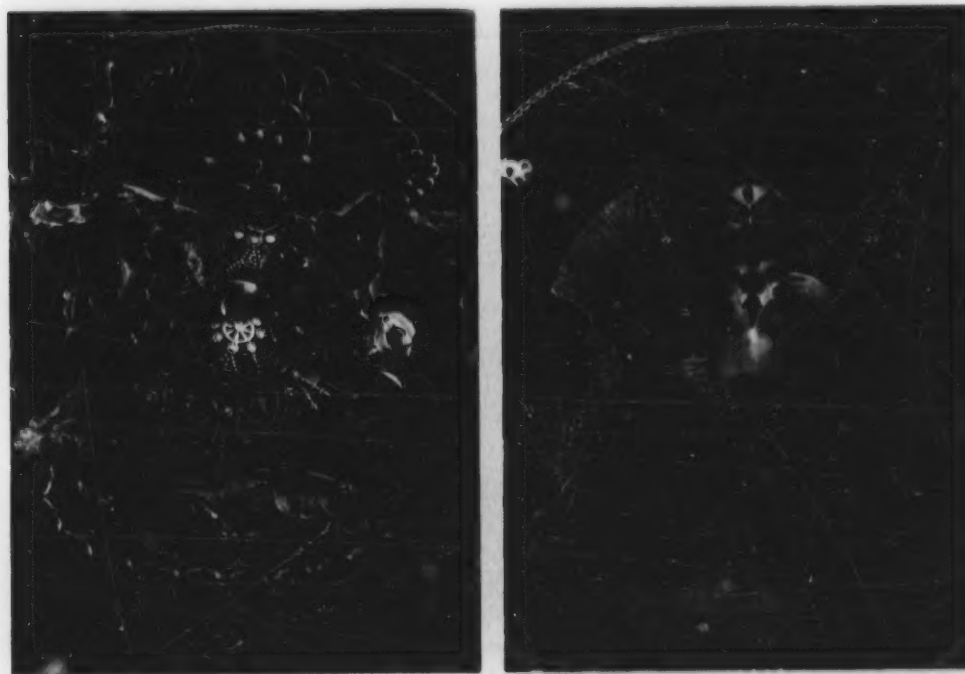
on supernatural beings for help during curing rituals. At the end of the ritual, the powerful image is destroyed.)

By making a sand mandala, the Buddhist monks make an offering to the deities. Buddhists believe that this act contributes to world peace and to the inner peace of individuals who look at the mandala. By pouring the sand into the river, the animals and plants living there are also blessed.

Buddhist Butter Sculptures

Making butter sculptures is part of the religious activities that Tibetan Buddhist monks do during the Tibetan New Year celebration. Using their fingers, the monks form butter, colored beforehand, into delicate figures of animals and deities, sometimes surrounded by tiny flowers and trees. Sculptures may be as small as one foot high or as big as thirty feet high, and may take months to complete. Each sculpture is made of dozens—and sometimes hundreds—of smaller pieces worked on by individual monks. When all the pieces are completed, they are put together and displayed for one day before they are destroyed.

Butter sculpture, like the sand mandala, is made as an offering to the Buddhist deities. And, like the sand mandala, Buddhists believe that working on, and looking at, the offering brings blessings to individuals. Today, many Tibetan monks live in India, where they were exiled when the Chinese Army invaded Tibet in 1959. A large number of monks also live in Nepal and Bhutan, where they continue the Buddhist practices that were developed in Tibet many centuries ago.



- Ornate sculptures, made from yak butter, are created each year by Buddhist monks who keep the Tibetan tradition alive.



Australia and the South Pacific



Although missionaries brought Christianity to Australia and the South Pacific islands in the early nineteenth century, many of the native peoples of this area continue to practice their traditional religious ways, while most non-native peoples practice Christianity. The traditional religious ways of indigenous cultures focus on the belief in spirits that may be called on to help people. Perhaps the most important of these are the spirits of the ancestors, as is common to traditional Africa, the Mexican Day of the Dead, and the Chinese ancestor tablet.

Entering the Spiritual Community

In some cultures, children learn about their religious traditions by reading sacred writings, while in others, they learn from the culture's oral tradition. The oral tradition is the custom of passing knowledge from one generation to the next by remembering and telling it, rather than writing it down. In this way, individuals learn to understand the world around them by listening and interacting with others, instead of reading.

Learning from the Oral Tradition

In the past, many cultures around the world used the oral tradition as a way of passing on their religious beliefs as well as their practical knowledge. Today, although writing is practiced in many areas where once it was not, the oral tradition is still the primary mode of shared heritage in some places. The Sepik of

- Two young people of Papua New Guinea dress as sacred ancestor spirits for a traditional ceremony.



A Dreamtime Story: The Creation of Sun and Moon

Dreamtime stories remain an important part of the Australian Aborigines' culture. They tell how things came to be, like the following story of how the sun and moon were created.

Long ago, when the world was first made and the ancestors were still living in it, there was neither light nor heat. One day, when two friends were casually rubbing two sticks together, a spark appeared. The men had accidentally learned how to make fire, which would warm the people and light their way. One of the men lit two torches. The larger one he gave to his companion, the smaller one he gave to his sister, along with instructions to both that the torches be kept burning.

Later, when humans, plants, and animals were created, and the ancestors became part of the Earth, the two who held the torches became the sun and the moon. The man, with the larger torch, became the sun, and the woman, with the smaller torch, became the moon.

Papua New Guinea, for example—like many cultures of the South Pacific islands—pass on their beliefs about good and bad spirits and the religious power of their ancestors through storytelling. Sometimes the stories are described in elaborate objects of art, such as carved masks or statues. These are stored in a special house called a *haus tambaran*, which is decorated with figures of ancestor spirits.

Making carvings or paintings in a society with an oral tradition is a common way of helping peoples remember culture's teachings. The Aborigines of Australia create sacred paintings on wooden boards, sheets of bark, cave walls, and the ground. These paintings tell about a time long ago called the Dreamtime. Dreamtime stories are part of the Aborigines' rich oral tradition. These are similar to Native-American creation stories in that they are richly tied to nature and tell how the world and all things were made.

According to the Aborigines, the land on which they live and all the plants and animals, including humans, were created during the Dreamtime. All were created by the Aborigines' ancestors, called the Creative Ancestors or the Sky Heroes, who



- Ancient Aboriginal handprints offer visual proof of initiation ceremonies and religious rituals that took place in northern Australia thousands of years ago.

then became part of the land themselves. Because of this basic belief, the land is sacred to the Aborigines, containing the spirit of their mystical ancestors.

Aborigines do not separate the present from the Dreamtime. Even though the events of the Dreamtime happened long ago, the Aborigines still remain connected to it. One way they stay connected is by going on a journey called the walkabout, undertaken by Aborigines for thousands of years. (A similar ritual, called vision quest, is traditionally undertaken by many Native

American groups.) When an Aborigine goes on a walkabout, he or she travels on sacred pathways, gathering food and water from the land along the way. The pathways are remembered in songs, passed from generation to generation. Although roads and towns sometimes interfere with the pathways, many Aborigines still continue to go on walkabouts. By following these paths, Aborigines renew their religious ties to the land and the Creative Ancestors who made it.

Community Rituals and Celebrations

In many cultures, when people need help in achieving something, they often have special rituals to call on the spirit world for assistance. During these rituals, a person may make or use

special objects to help him or her bring about a desired result. It is hoped that the forces that are called upon will help the person to use the object in a successful way. This is sometimes called sorcery or magic. It is a way of getting the spirits to help humans do something that humans might not be able to do alone.

Sorcery and Illness

In some cultures, illness and death are often believed to occur as a result of supernatural activity. When a person wishes to inflict harm on another person, he or she may call on the spirits and ask them to make an enemy sick. Many of the traditional cultures of the South Pacific—as well as Australia, Africa, the Americas, and some cultures of the Mediterranean region—believe that illness is often caused by this kind of sorcery. Yet a sorcerer may also call on the spirit world to heal someone.

According to the Baktaman of Papua New Guinea, there are two kinds of sorcery: that which is caused by men and that which is caused by women. Each has its own kind of rituals. To prevent illness, the Baktaman wear protective amulets and pray to their ancestors to keep them safe and healthy.

Magic is not used only in matters of health. In many cultures of the South Pacific islands, it is used to protect crops and pigs, two main sources of food for the traditional peoples. Among the people of the Trobriand Islands, yams are the most important food, so women often tend their gardens while using magical herbs and repeating special words to help the yams grow. Also in the Trobriands, where the game of cricket was introduced by the British, magic is sometimes used to help players win a match.

Men's and Women's Secret Knowledge

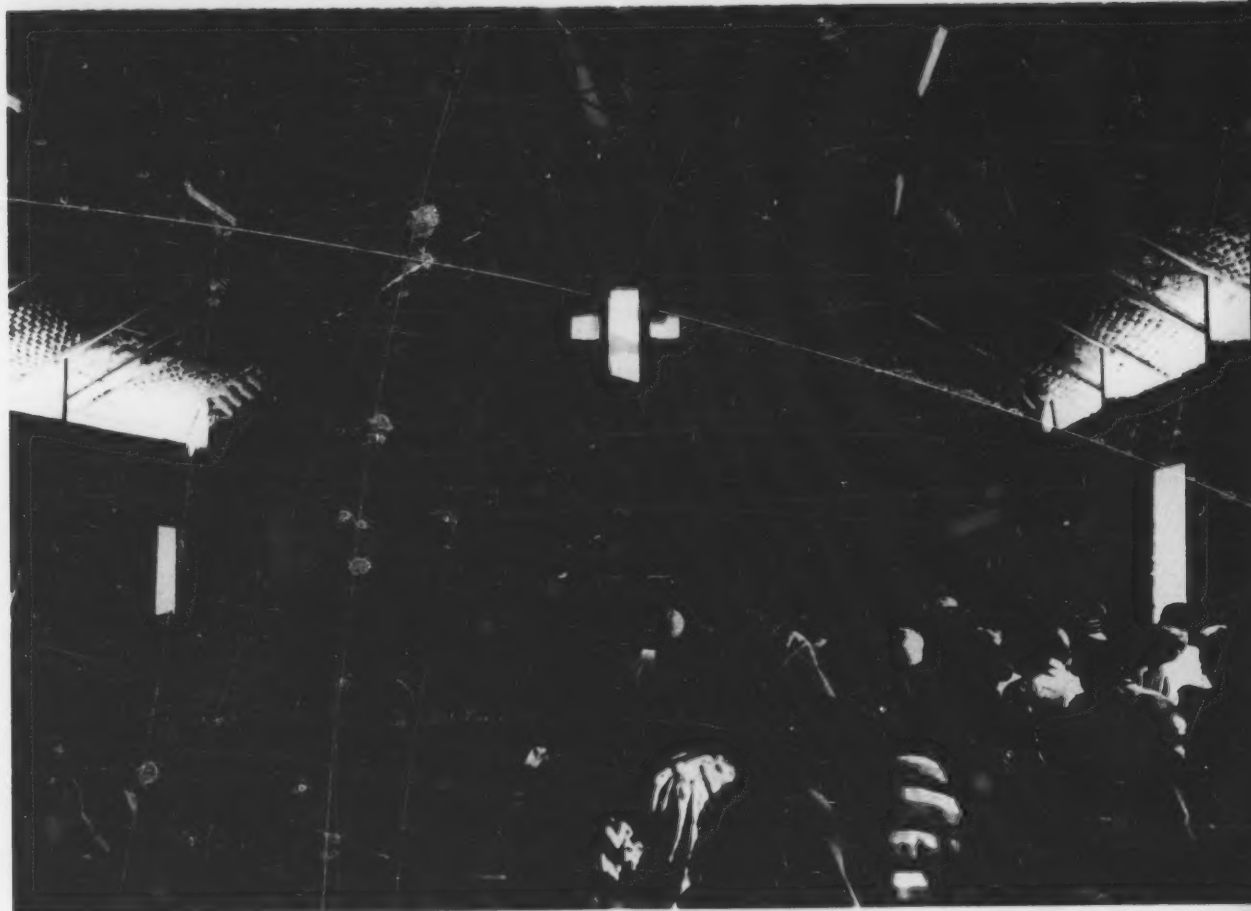
In many cultures, knowledge of certain rituals and ceremonies is shared only by certain members of the community. Often, men have their own kinds of secret rituals, and women have theirs. Among the Australian Aborigines, for example, special rituals are held for girls as they begin to mature. At different stages in a girl's life, the women of the community gather together to

perform the rituals. At these times, the girl learns how to attract a boy by using "love magic."

In the South Pacific islands, men have traditionally built special houses in which they store their ceremonial objects and perform rituals that are practiced only by men. Many of the cultures of the South Pacific today still have this practice. The *haus tambaran* of the Sepik is an example of such a house. Like the men's houses in almost all cultures of Papua New Guinea, the *haus tambaran* are sacred places in which women and children are not allowed to enter. It is here that the men's ritual knowledge is shared and their sacred objects are stored. The sacred objects that go into the men's houses are also made by men in a place where the carvers will not be disturbed by women and children. (Special places such as this can be found in other cultures as well. The Hopi, for example, have special ceremonial rooms, called *kivas*, where men's secret rituals are performed and ritual objects are stored.)

- Christian clergy take part in a traditional procession on All Saints' Day in Sydney, Australia.





- Communion is held for a group of Papua New Guinea highlanders in a Catholic church near Mount Hagen.

The haus tambaran is also where Sepik boys of fifteen or sixteen years of age undergo their initiation rituals. Like initiation rituals in traditional African cultures, Sepik initiation prepares boys for adulthood in religious as well as practical matters, which they learn from elders of the community. Besides learning things like how to hunt, the boys learn about the ancestor spirits and how to respect them. According to the Telefolmin, another culture of Papua New Guinea, it is the power of the ancestors that allows their children to grow healthy and the food supply to remain abundant. To make sure this continues, the Telefolmin believe the ancestors must be properly respected. Besides the Sepik and the Telefolmin, initiation is also practiced among other cultures of Papua New Guinea and among the Australian Aborigines.

Conclusion: A World of Beliefs

As we have seen from the peoples and cultures described in this book, religion and spirituality play an important role in the lives of humans around the globe. Religion unites people of the same faith throughout the world. Each year on Christmas Eve, for example, every Catholic kneeling in church for midnight mass knows that other Catholics in churches around the world

- The faithful crowd a room housing a statue of the Virgin Mary that they believe weeps actual tears in San Antonio, Texas, in the United States.



- A service is held inside a Christian church, fashioned from snow, in the Lapland region of Northern Europe.

are praying as well. On Yom Kippur, every Jew standing in a synagogue reciting the ancient prayers knows that those same words have been recited by Jews for thousands of years.

Wherever people make their homes, they carry their religious and spiritual traditions with them. Religion is often firmly rooted at the center of many cultures. It is often unchanging—it is something that is taught and learned from generation to generation through the ages. Sometimes it is learned from family members, sometimes from religious leaders. Sometimes it is learned by participating in rituals and ceremonies, sometimes in special schools. In some cultures, spiritual teachings are expressed in the oral tradition. In others, it is recorded in sacred texts and scriptures and studied word by word.

• A Buddhist temple in Ky. has 10,000 stupa, an image of a Buddha.

Religion and spirituality touch almost all aspects of life within a culture. They guide an individual in rituals from birth, through initiation and growth, and finally to death. They can be found at the heart of many artistic traditions, such as dance, music, and fine arts. In some places, religion and spirituality are the driving force behind long spiritual journeys to sacred places. Religious and spiritual beliefs are often so strong that, in many cultures, people will adapt to introduced religious ideas. They will mix the new with the old, rather than completely give up their traditional practices.

Whether it is a community celebration or an individual praying, an elaborate ceremony or the wearing of a single amulet, fasting, spiritual possession, or making offerings to the ancestors, religious beliefs are continually expressed in rituals and ceremonies that unite people through worship and fulfill the uniquely human spiritual needs in each of us.

Glossary

dalang A person who controls the puppets in an Indonesian shadow-puppet performance.

diviner A person who has the power to foretell the future by various means, including speaking with the spirits of the dead.

Dreamtime Among the Aborigines of Australia, the time when the land on which they live and all the plants and animals, including humans, were created.

haus tambaran A building used by some cultures of Papua New Guinea to hold sacred masks and carvings. It is also used by men for sacred rituals.

kachinas Among the Hopi, friendly spirits that bring rain.

kami In the Shinto religion, spirits of natural things, such as plants, rocks, and waterfalls.

Koran The holy scripture that Muslims believe to be the word of Allah (God) given to the Prophet Muhammad so that he could bring it to the people.

loa In the Vodou religion, a spirit.

mandala A circular drawing or painting, usually decorated with sacred images.

marabout A Sufi leader. (Sufism is a sect of Islam.)

ofrenda A family altar made and used by Mexicans during the Day of the Dead celebration to honor their deceased relatives.

samshin halmoni In Korea, the spirit responsible for a child's birth, health, and well-being.

shaman A healer who communicates with the spirit world, usually by going into trance.

tihu Carved kachina figures given to Hopi children during ceremonies.

wayang An Indonesian shadow-puppet performance.

wimple A piece of clean, unbleached cloth on which an Ashkenazic infant is circumcised.

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OUR HUMAN FAMILY

Not long ago, interest in multiculturalism hit North America's shores like a tidal wave. With it came a new drive to understand the traditions and beliefs of other peoples around the world. Understanding, in turn, fostered a greater appreciation and respect for the ways of life that differ from our own.

Today, as the first multicultural wave recedes, it leaves in its wake a flood of material—all of which strives to emphasize the fascinating variety among world cultures. But variety is only one part of the multicultural mosaic. As the second multicultural wave now gains momentum, it brings with it a vital need to focus not only on our differences, but also on our similarities. That's what the OUR HUMAN FAMILY series is all about.

OUR HUMAN FAMILY now brings multiculturalism around full circle. By emphasizing the common bonds that run through every human culture—those basic features of life that are shared by people no matter where they live—the series reveals and extolls the striking similarities among us all. Appreciating our similarities, as well as our differences, is what binds us together as one big "human family."

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